

Vodou Hybridity and “Voodoo Economics”: Crossroads Theology at the Intersection of the Local and Global

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“Those who are on the margins have no option but to occupy in-between spaces as a survival strategy. From this interstitial space any claims to cultural purity, stability, or autonomy are less important than the hybridized conditions of perpetual intercultural exchange, juxtaposition, interrogation, and transgression.”

R. S. Sugirtharajah

“... given the globalized context, a contextual theology will have to be able to utilize paradox and contradiction in an effective way, inasmuch as globalization is shot through with paradox (global-local relations) and contradiction (promising one thing, delivering another).”

Peter Schreiter

Dorothee Sölle (1929-2003) - Presente!

This paper will examine the importance of hybridity as local strategy that negotiates, in often complex ways, contemporary neoliberal globalization(s) in the Americas. I will argue that hybridity is a form of resistance to past and present forms of neocolonial¹ power, but also that it is a strategy of creating life *out of* the often turbulent and hostile forces of globalization.² Certain attempts by progressive theologians to describe the harsh realities produced by neoliberalism on the South - and on the more vulnerable sectors of society in the North – show a tendency to silence those most affected by these economic

¹ For Edward Said, “‘imperialism’ means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distinct territory: ‘colonialism,’ which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implantation of settlements on a distant territory” (1993: 8).

² Globalization is a contested term; it encapsulates many definitions and directions. It is not one thing, but multiple and often contradictory processes. While I reject purely economic definitions of the term, I also reject definitions that only posit culture as determinative. For a good review of the debates on globalization, see Malcolm Waters (2001).

policies unless they are perceived as actively resisting them. Unlike the “heroic struggles” that attracted much attention in Latin America in the 1980s for example, the less visible hybrid strategies of those most affected by neoliberal globalization are often forgotten. As Serge Gruzinski argues, an understanding of hybridity “runs against intellectual habits which favor monolithic ensembles over ‘in-between’ spaces... The simplicity of dualistic and Manichaeic approaches is appealing, they soothe our conscience even as they satisfy our thirst for purity, innocence, and archaism” (2002: 22). I propose to weave together liberationist and postcolonial hermeneutics in order to highlight the hybrid history of the Americas, and to highlight the importance of hybridity for the creation of contextual theologies in light of the realities of globalization and empire.³

I want to name the theology developed here a *crossroads* theology. Inspired by the Vodou notion of *kafou*,⁴ a Creole⁵ word similar to the French *carrefour*, which represents the meeting place between the divine and human realm, a place of crossing and intersection, crossroads theology finds its voice *in-between* local and global realities. The *crossroads* are the reality of many peoples in the Americas, including my own. As the son of a southern Italian migrant mother and a Québécois father, I have had to live in a hybrid world, constantly crossing between southern Italian and French-Canadian cultures, all the while attempting to create space for myself in the homogenizing and dominant Protestant Anglo-Saxon reality of North America. The theology developed here is inspired by, and

in dialogue with, postcolonial hermeneutics, liberation theologies, and the ‘new voices’ in theology, especially Latino/a theologies⁶ in the U.S., which have developed the notions of *mestizaje* and border (*frontera*) realities as important categories for their particular contexts. Hybridity, as it will be defined here, is not a new strategy of survival for the peoples of the Americas; it is a central process of many years of struggle under colonial rule. As a result, hybridity can never be understood outside of the history of asymmetrical power relations and colonial oppression. Postcolonialism is a critical theory of emancipation; it does not indicate that we are in a historical moment that has progressed beyond colonialism. Postcolonialism is a style of enquiry that challenges dominant forms of knowledge; it encompasses a “variety of concerns, oppositional stances, and even contradictory positions” (Sugirtharajah 2002: 11). The Americas are still deeply entrenched in colonial relations.⁷ I will utilize the terms “Vodou hybridity” as a way to speak about how colonial rule has been subverted and/or resisted in the Americas. Hybrid practices continue to be prominent under the contemporary form of neocolonial rule: namely, the form of economic globalization called neoliberalism, and otherwise known as “voodoo economics” by the elites of Wall Street.

This *crossroads* theology is also inspired by the Gospel passage in Mark 5: 21–43, where a marginalized hemorrhaging woman empowers herself to heal, and where Jesus brings a young girl back to life by taking her hand and saying the words “*talitha cum*,” or “little girl get up!” (v. 41). In this passage, we discern Jesus and the hemorrhaging woman crossing rigid boundaries, boundaries set by gender constraints, purity codes, and imperial rule. The rigid boundaries crossed by Jesus, which were intensified as markers of national identity under Roman occupation, are the kinds of boundaries and borders crossed by marginalized peoples everyday in the Americas, especially as they attempt to negotiate a life for themselves under hostile conditions. In a “legionary economy,”⁸ such as Roman-

³ Notwithstanding the polemical and totalizing discussions surrounding the publication of *Empire* (2000), by Hardt and Negri, I tend to agree with them that “[i]mperialism was really an extension of the sovereignty of the European nation-states beyond their own boundaries” (xii). Any notion of imperialism today must contend with the declining sovereignty of the nation-state under globalizations. Thus, they use the term empire as a “decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule” that “manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command” (xii–xiii). Whether or not one agrees with their definitions of empire - and the post-9/11 context tends to contradict some of their claims - the attempt to delineate the present system of empire from nineteenth century imperialism is an important consideration.

⁴ This Creole word is sometimes spelt *kalfou*. Maya Deren defines the Vodou crossroads as such: “All ceremonies begin with the salute to the guardian of the cross/roads, the loa principle of crossing, of communication with the divine world. Yet the figure of the cross/roads can be seen from the perspective of either world it straddles (1970: 37).”

⁵ Edouard Glissant has developed the notion of “créolisation” as a particular expression of hybridity in the Caribbean. In a interview, Glissant writes this: “la créolisation [est le] processus par lequel des éléments hétérogènes de culture et d’existence sont mis en contact sans que l’on puisse prévoir la synthèse.” For Glissant, creolisation has a quality of the unexpected to it. See Glissant (1999).

⁶ See Aquino, “Theological Method in U.S. Latino/a Theology” (1999), for a good overview of Latino/a methodologies.

⁷ Sugirtharajah writes this: “. . . several critics contend and recognize that, when it is used with a hyphen, ‘post-colonial,’ the term is seen as indicating the historical period aftermath of colonialism, and without the hyphen, ‘postcolonial,’ as signifying a reactive resistance discourse. . . .” (2002: 13). For a good critique of the ‘post-colonial’ historical moment from an indigenous perspective, see Jace Weaver, “‘From I-Hermeneutics to We-Hermeneutics: Native Americans and the Post-Colonial’” (1998).

⁸ Warren Carter defines the “legionary economy” as such: “The threat of the military muscle of the legions ensured that most people complied with the payment of tribute and taxes” (2001: 10).

occupied Palestine, the healing of the hemorrhaging woman and the raising of the young girl are not only about the transgression of Levitical purity codes.⁹ Following Richard Horsley, the "original hearers of the Gospel would have known tacitly and implicitly . . . that both the individual and the social hemorrhaging and near death were effects of the people's subjugation to imperial forces" (2001: 109). The boundary crossing exemplified by Jesus in the Markan passage, his non-compliance with respect to an 'impure' hemorrhaging woman who courageously reaches out to him and the 'impure' (near) dead body of the child who he touches, is a site of hybridity. It is hybrid because they are actions that disrupt dominant forms of exclusion and furtively subvert rigid dichotomies. Hybridity is what James C. Scott has called a "weapon of the weak," within the arsenal of sometimes hidden resistance strategies among the most vulnerable of our world (Scott 1985). Moreover, the boundary crossing in the action of the hemorrhaging woman, who reaches out from the crowds and impetuously touches Jesus' cloak without his permission, is act of hybridization par-excellence. Why? First, because it is *the woman's initiative mixed with Jesus' empowering letting go* that creates healing; it is not the dichotomous action of one person with power healing a powerless victim. Secondly, because her actions evidence the often hidden ways the most marginalized create space for themselves in order to promote life. While her self-healing may not eradicate the systems that promote exclusion, it is nonetheless a life-giving survival strategy that is common for vulnerable peoples. Similarly, while Jesus' commensal practices of radical inclusivity and healing do not eradicate disease or systems that promote marginalization, they are nonetheless 'signs' of hybrid resistance that emerge *out of* the conditions of exclusion. These actions constitute hybridity in the Markan text because the woman and Jesus are able to produce spaces for themselves that interrupt the rigid boundaries that separate, segregate, and classify

⁹ Many critics who discuss this passage tend to highlight Jesus' transgression of Jewish purity laws. This kind of analysis can verge on anti-Judaism and lead to a form of colonial representation of local cultures. Jewish purity laws were not everywhere the same thing in history. The history of imperial and colonial subjugation has demonstrated how such laws can rigidify under occupation because they serve as markers of national identity. Because the Roman empire understood its role in universal terms, religious leaders sought to safeguard their own national cultures and religions by rigidifying boundaries. This is usually an elite reaction to the imperial threat. The actions of the hemorrhaging woman constitute a hybrid moment in-between these realities. Warren Carter writes that "religious matters are not separate from social and political issues in the imperial world. No conflict is 'just' or 'simply' a religious one" (2001: 35). See Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man* (1988), for an excellent political-religious reading of this passage that tends, however, to leave out the role of imperial rule on local traditions.

people into such categories as subjugator/subjugated, pure/impure, colonizer/colonized, and active/passive.

Hybridity, from the Latin *hybrida*, meaning the offspring of two different animals or plants, or something of heterogeneous composition, is employed here in order to reclaim the often dismissed and devalued strategic syncretisms of marginalized peoples. But I am employing the term more broadly than its original biological definition, and its association with haphazard mixing. I am using it along the lines delineated in the postcolonial theory of Homi Bhabha: as a "third space." For Bhabha, the "third space" interrupts the usual dualistic constructions of colonialism: Christianity/'voodoo,' European/savage, white/black, man/woman, faith/magic, life/death, civilization/primitive, us/them, rational/irrational, light/ dark, pure/impure, etc. For him, this "third space" is linked to the notion of hybridity; it is the location of imperfect subaltern mimicry.¹⁰ It is a space that is often *in-between* the dualistic categories imposed within the discourses of colonialism. The "third space" is a space that both justifies hegemony (using the master's tools), and at the same time preempts colonial authority (to disrupt¹¹ the master's house). Some critics have labeled this (quite appropriately!) "the logic of inappropriate appropriation" (Gandhi 1998: 150). While I will not focus on Bhabha's notion of "third space"¹² in this paper, I raise it here in order to situate the term within the framework of postcolonial theory. And while much has been written on hybridity within postcolonial theory, it is still perceived as a dangerous term in theology. The term has

¹⁰ I borrow the term subaltern from the work of Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci. In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci uses the term subaltern classes (*le classe subalterne*) interchangeably with the terms subordinate and instrumental classes. The subaltern classes belong to civil society, the sphere of hegemonic consent. They are the classes that form the base and thus instrumentalized to uphold state power. "Imperfect subaltern mimicry" thus denotes a strategy of mimicry by the subaltern classes, which utilizes dominant forms as a tool of resistance. A good example of this strategy can be found in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, where the fictional Caliban says to his colonial mistress: "you taught me language, and my profit on't is, I know how to curse." This is a strategy that protests "out of" rather than "against" the impositions of colonialism.

¹¹ This is a play on the famous essay by Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider* (1984: 110-114). More often than not, the master's tools are the only tools available to the marginalized. A good example of this strategy is the way the slave master's Bible was used as a subversive tool of resistance by African-American slaves. See James Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues* (1972), and Diana L. Hayes, *And Still We Rise* (1996).

¹² On the "third space," see Homi K. Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Difference" (1995). On hybridity, see Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994): "[Hybridity] unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. . . the effect of colonial power is seen to be the production of hybridization rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of native traditions. . ." (112).

only begun to be explored by theologians.¹³ While not as starkly pejorative as syncretism, hybridity also has derogatory resonances within the Christian tradition; it is often understood as an affront to a ‘pure’ doctrine or gospel, or as an attack on the dignity of ‘authentic’ ancient cultures; it is also perceived as relativizing the boundaries of orthodoxy, and feared for assimilating differences. Following R.S. Sugirtharajah, I understand hybrid processes to be “not about the dissolution of differences, but about the renegotiating the structure of power built on differences” (2002: 191). Moreover, much of the fear around relativism and its potential dangers usually stems out of the ideological interests of hegemonic groups.¹⁴ Within colonial missions, rigid and fixed theological borders were (are!) vital for securing and legitimizing Western Christian identity in the world. Hybridized identities are strategies of contestation in the face of these stark borders set up to sanction and sacralize the interests of dominant groups. However, as Leela Gandhi argues, “if the language of hybridity is to retain any seriously political meaning, it must first concede that for some oppressed peoples, in some circumstances, the fight is simply not over. Hybridity is not the only enlightened response to oppression” (Gandhi 1998: 136). In other words, in some places resistance may take on more Manichean contours, and certain oppressions may result in strategically different forms of struggle. The biblical witness imparts different models of resistance to Christians: the more hybrid *out of* approach, as with the hemorrhaging woman, and the more oppositional *against* approach, as described in John’s Revelation, or in Jesus’ confrontation with the Temple elite in Jerusalem, which resulted in his execution on the Roman cross.

This paper will consider the value of hybrid practices among marginalized peoples, practices that often transgress, interrupt, and reformulate the dichotomies of colonial rule. In particular, I focus on Vodou and its history of resistance in order to rework the neocolonial term “voodoo economics.” I will argue that hybridity is a strategy of survival for the discounted, the dismissed, and the disposable peoples of the Americas who often live in liminal borderlands, at the crossroads, and *in-between* the local and global realities of colonial (and neocolonial) rule.

The Context: “Voodoo Economics” and Vodou peoples

During the 1980 Republican primaries in the United States, presidential candidate George Bush (Sr.) attempted to embarrass front-runner Ronald Reagan’s proposal to cut taxes as a means of increasing revenue by labeling his ideas “voodoo economics.” The economic ideas of the new U.S. President became the mainstay of the so-called Reagan-Thatcher agenda, based on the classical liberal economic philosophy of efficient ‘free-market’ activity unhampered by the regulation of the nation-state. The sharp return of classical liberal economic philosophy to the agenda of the Reagan administration, and promoted by economists such as Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman, did not happen overnight. It made its first appearance in Chile under the U.S.-supported military dictatorship of General Pinochet. Chile was a neoliberal laboratory in the 1970s, where U.S. advisers installed and experimented with an “unrestricted free market economy” (Hobsbawm 1994: 409). Notwithstanding his pejorative remarks, George Bush (Sr.) also embraced this philosophy in his role as Vice-President, and later President of the U.S. As a result, the term “voodoo economics” took on a life of its own in the vocabulary of neoliberal global capitalism. Today, the neoliberal lexicon regularly employs the term “voodoo economics,” and has expanded itself to include terms such as “witch doctors of Wall Street,” “zombie businesses,” and other terms that highlight the occluded workings of the capitalist elite.¹⁵

George Bush (Sr.)’s cynical attempt to ridicule the ideas of Ronald Reagan during the opening chapter of what is now understood as the global hegemonic ‘triumph’ of neoliberalism,¹⁶ by invoking Vodou, the religious system of Haïti, is theologically significant for several reasons. Firstly, it highlights the very real connection between the global spread of this economic philosophy and its local impacts on those peoples closely associated with Vodou practices in the Americas, especially the marginalized and dispossessed. Secondly, it reveals the very real interventions that hegemonic global neoliberal capitalism relies on to survive. In other words, like the “voodoo” it ridicules, neoliberalism is also

¹³ See R.S. Sugirtharajah (2002).

¹⁴ See Aquino, “Theological Method in U.S. Latino/a Theology” (1999), especially her section on the “intercultural” as an important category for addressing the fears of relativism.

¹⁵ For examples of the vocabulary borrowed from Vodou religious practices, see James Brooke, “Japan Hesitates to Put an End to its ‘Zombie’ Businesses,” *New York Times* (October 29, 2002), and Robert H. Parks, *The Witch Doctor of Wall Street: A Noted Financial Expert Guides You Through Today’s Voodoo Economics* (1996).

¹⁶ See Groupe de théologie contextuelle québécoise, “Le néo-libéralisme triomphant” (1996).

an attempt to control and intervene in the world, and not, as many neo-liberal High Priests argue, a retreat from intervention and regulation. Thirdly, the 'voodoo' in George Bush (Sr.)'s neocolonial discourse speaks to the continued proliferation of those supposed 'enchancements,' 'superstitions,' and 'irrationalities' that the liberal and radical prophets of modernity had predicted would disappear in their secularization theories. Quite to the contrary, within the present context of neoliberal globalization, we have seen the irruption of trans-localized religious renewal in many shapes and sizes. These "signs of the times" are of particular interest to theologians focused on the concrete and daily universe of religious peoples, especially those living in the liminal areas at the boundaries of local/global encounters. And fourthly, for the enslaved people of Haïti, Vodou has historically been a strategy of resistance and survival, and constitutes a central counternarrative (the 1791 slave revolts) to the emergence of an oppressive system (1492), in its triangular structure of domination between Europe (production), indigenous America (labor-free resources), and Africa (slave trade). In this sense, "voodoo,"¹⁷ a racist term used by colonizing outsiders, is here reworked as a broader category of counterhistory, not only in terms of political, racial, and economic oppression, but also in the ecclesiological and theological underpinnings of Christendom. Thus, Vodou is understood here as a broader site of hybrid resistance in the context of global/local encounters in the Americas. And it is at the *crossroads* of local/global boundaries, at its borders, that a relevant contextual theology may be forged.

Since the events of 9/11/2001, the U.S. has taken on a more aggressive and unilateral military role in global geopolitics. Over a year after U.S. and British military incursions into Iraq, we are seeing more instability than "freedom," and more injustice than "democracy" on a global level. The "war on terror" has generated very a visible "theatrics of terror" (Taylor 2001) in places such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Palestine. However, recent low-intensity U.S. incursions in places like Haïti, which lead to the "kidnapping" of Bertrand Aristide, and the attempts to destabilize the Chavez government in Venezuela, are reminders that the less overt workings of empire in the Americas are alive and well.¹⁸ Yet we continue to be reminded by theologies of liberation, and

other theologies of emancipatory praxis, that an undeclared war against the poor has been raging with a particular ferocity in the Americas since the beginning of the 1970s, since the initial steps taken by the U.S. government to implement "voodoo economics" in places like Chile (9/11/1973). The prophetic witness of black journalist, Mumia Abu-Jamal, from death row in the U.S., also reminds us that this is a program based on fear and terror: "Fear creates a cowed labor force which, when faced with givebacks, won't even whimper. High poverty signals capitalism triumphant" (1997: 117). Indeed, these have been spectral times, where whole cities in the North have become ghost towns and local production phantasmal, and where peoples in the South are compelled to comply with the workings of an "invisible hand" - only to find out, as did Argentina for example, the very real depths of plundering that resulted from this compulsion. Abu-Jamal's writings from Pennsylvania's death row, in what Mark Lewis Taylor has appropriately called "lockdown America," serves as a reminder to the conscience of North Americans, that we continue to live in a gated world sustained by a political terror that seeks to lock away those deemed disposable and unmanageable in our societies. If, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the global asymmetries have repositioned themselves from Western capitalist/Soviet communist to North/South, this gated set up is not only in evidence between regions of the world, but also within them. The widening gap between the rich and poor, which has become a statistical cliché in recent years, does only run across the map of global center/periphery dynamics, but it is also mapped locally. This is not to insist that the local is but a simple reflection of global realities. Rather, in this specific moment of what some fashionably call "space/time compression," we must attempt to engage not only with the manifold and complex ways the global is being localized, but also how the local is being globalized.

This theology is an attempt at understanding the relationship between "voodoo economics" and Vodou peoples. In other words, how does the local religious worldview of a marginalized people, forged on the periphery of an exploitative world-system, relate to the so-called 'triumph' of global neoliberal capitalism? This *crossroads* theology is concerned with permeable boundaries, with "leaky borders," as the Bush (Jr.) administration has consistently accused Canada for its ostensibly lax border surveillance in light of the events of 9/11. In times when the colonial dispossession of Palestinian peoples is "finally resolved"

¹⁷ The term 'voodoo' is "a deterioration of the Dahomean term *vodu* or *vodun*, meaning "deity" or "spirit" (Desmangles 1992: 2).

¹⁸ See Paul Farmer, "Who Removed Aristide?" (2004): <http://zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=55&ItemID=5318>.

through the construction of walls that separate the Israelis from the occupied territories, when “security parameters” are being erected all around North America, and when the EU model of open borders veils the reality of “fortress Europe,” an engaged Christian contextual theology must position itself in the liminal, often hybrid, areas that transgress the realities of the gated region, the gated nation, and the gated community. Any Christian theology that takes seriously G*d’s preferential option for the poor and excluded must stand at the borderlands of local/global encounters, where the ghostly disappearance of capital from certain regions - in a global system Fidel Castro has aptly called “casino capitalism” - has created a migrant class of people seeking new possibilities and renewed lives. These are indeed paradoxical times, times when the repeated mantra of “free trade” and “open borders” is met by gated nationhood, times of instant wealth for the few and steady impoverishment for the majorities, times of space-time compression in the face of capital distantiation from its base of production, times when modernist rationalities are haunted by trans-localized religious practices, and most importantly, these are times of deep hybridities in the face of homogenizing forces.

The inauguration of “voodoo economics” in the 1970s and 1980s, has a special relationship with Vodou peoples, because they have had to bear the burden of the system’s spectral workings. With the inauguration of “voodoo economics,” Vodou peoples also witnessed the appearance of a mysterious document from Santa Fe; ghostly armies in Nicaragua fighting contra the Sandinistas; strange meetings with Vodou theologians (such as Leonardo Boff) in the dark halls of the Roman curia; the frightening assassination of bishops, priests, theologians, and lay catechists; the proliferation of death squads; the terrifying loss of life in places like El Salvador and Guatemala; and a host of other frightening occurrences. In fact, “voodoo economics” conjured away a whole decade for Southern peoples: a “lost decade” for millions of Vodou peoples. “Voodoo economics” has made it difficult for peoples in the South to now distinguish between “nightmares and hopes” (Cormie 1999: 118). A frightening situation indeed! With the inauguration of “voodoo economics” we also saw a radical shift take place within the arena of global capital: suddenly, more capital was flowing North than moving South - and this in debt servicing alone (George 1992: xv). Southern debts (those odious loans given to corrupt dictators) among the poorest countries in Latin America skyrocketed, bringing Mexico, for example, close to the threshold of bankruptcy.

The case of odious debt reveals quite clearly the ability of “voodoo economics” to conjure wealth. Since Vodou peoples possess wealth primarily in natural resources, a jump in export production to pay the increasing interest on these debts was the only way to make payments. Moreover, interest rate hikes - a new monetarist economic policy implemented by the Federal Reserve Bank in the U.S. - in these early days of “voodoo economics” soared by “as much as 20 percent” (Duchrow 1995: 76). According to Ulrich Duchrow, “the policy of interest rates was again reinforced by the greatest stock-piling of armaments ever seen in peace time” (*ibid.*). And let us not forget the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in the South, prescribed by the World Bank/International Monetary Fund, which saw the uncanny disappearance of public enterprises and social programs. The outflow from South to North, however, was unfortunately paid back to the South, in the form of ghostly armies, undeclared wars against countries who dared to opt for an alternative economic option, and in the plundering of their eco-systems.

“Voodoo economics” for Vodou peoples. Since these early days of “voodoo economics” neoliberal capitalism has intensified in all regions of the world. In the early 1990s, the so-called “Asian Tigers,” the poster children of neoliberal ideology, were not spared the sudden retreat of investment from their countries. In a flash, near economic collapse was on the horizon, but the steady hand of WB/IMF loans and prescriptions weathered the storm. These poster children were countries, Ramón Grosfoguel reminds us, who

received disproportionately large sums of U.S. foreign aid and favorable conditions for economic growth, such as flexible terms to pay their debts, special tariff agreements that made commodities produced in these areas accessible to the metropolitan markets, and/or technological transfers. Most of these showcases’ success lasted for several years, subsequently failing. However, they were crucial to produce an ideological hegemony over Third World peoples in favor of pro-U.S. developmentalist programs (Grosfoguel: 371).

For instance, Chile continues to be used as proof that neoliberalism is advantageous to those who followed the specific tenets of WB/IMF prescriptions: the neoliberal Holy Trinity of privatization, liberalization, and deregulation. They were also used to disprove *dependentista* (dependency) theories in favor of a re-articulated neo-developmental perspective for Latin America. Economic miracles and enchantments were on the rise in those times of “voodoo economics.”

As Argentina has most recently shown, however, putting one’s faith in the

“invisible hand” of the ‘free market’ has serious consequences. The story that Aristotle tells about King Midas (the man who wished that everything he touched turned to gold, but died instead of hunger), speaks to the alchemical potential of capital accumulation. In distinguishing between a need-oriented-economy (*oikonomia*) and a money-accumulation-economy (*chrematistics*), Aristotle suggests that faith in the workings of a ‘free market,’ for the sole purpose of accumulation, can only lead to starvation (Duchrow 1995: 21). Accumulation has its limits; they are measured by ecological footprints. For in a world of monopoly capitalism and corporate globalization, faith in the ‘free market’ is tantamount to belief in spells and magic. Yet, this magic has proven to work for a tiny elite of people who continue to amass wealth and who see themselves as the managerial vanguard of “common sense” revolutions. The neoliberal vanguard understands its role to be that of able managers of the common good of all peoples, in fact, the whole earth. For a discourse that understands itself to be rational and scientific, and based on a “common sense” ethic, blind faith and irrationalities prevails within the neoliberal ethos. The fact that in Latin America and the Caribbean alone, “180 million people live in poverty and 80 million survive in misery,” according to the Latin American Jesuits (LAJ), should give pause to even the casual observer about “common sense” claims (LAJ 1996: 1). How do local traditions negotiate and protest the harsh impacts of neoliberal globalization? I want to examine some discourses that consider how the global incursions of neoliberalism impact on local traditions.

Vodou Resistance and Local Hybridities

The term Vodou refers to the very diverse and local forms of religious expression found among the heirs of African slaves in the Caribbean, especially those who were originally transported to the islands that are today the Dominican Republic, Haïti, and Cuba. Thus, Vodou is a complex set of religious beliefs and practices that are found predominantly among the peoples of Haïti, and which originated in the African-Catholic-indigenous encounter of the Americas. However, Vodou is not simply a local phenomenon in Haïti, it is a migrant reality that has transplanted itself into some major cities in North America, including New Orleans, Montréal, and New York. While the colonizing term “voodoo” derives from the discourses of global systems that have attempted to domesticate its explosive and potentially subversive character, its

root word, *vodun*, derives from the language of the Dahomean Fon peoples of the Abomey kingdom (present-day Bénin). It refers to the divine spirit in the traditional cosmic religious perspective of African peoples. Vodou is said to have originated among sugar-plantation workers in the 17th century, and thus a product of the plantation economy. Alfred Métraux has noted that Vodou, “for all its African heritage, belongs to the modern world...” (1972: 365). The early written history of Vodou is preserved only in eighteenth century colonial records and ordinances. These records reported nocturnal gatherings (“black magic”), drums and dancing (“possessions”), and funerary practices (“zombies”) among the slaves, which were perceived as potentially dangerous to colonial governance in the region. This was the religious context at the time of the 1791 slave revolts, headed by the “black Jacobin” Toussaint Louverture and the Vodou priest Boukman, which were so crushing to France’s confidence in controlling lands in the Americas that it “ceded the largest land mass even received by the United States government, the Louisiana purchase” (Taylor 1997: 183). But as Paul Farmer also suggests, “if Saint-Domingue might be likened to barrels of gunpowder, the French Revolution of 1789 was the spark that ignited them” (2003: 95). Hence, this history of resistance exhibits a hybridity that appropriates from the global and re-creates itself at the local.

I draw on Vodou history as an example of liminal spatiality in the Americas, that meeting place between the local and global, as a locality of resistant hybridity in the context of globalization. My invocation of Vodou history is an attempt to discern some of the pressing issues for doing theology, following Peter Schreier, “between the local and global” (1997). I understand Vodou to be a central place for this encounter because it is persistently represents a local context of resistant hybridities, which has trans-local affinities in the Americas, especially in the popular religion(s) of the poor, in some ‘new’ religious movements, Afro-Latino/a syncretisms, and in the religious practices of indigenous peoples.¹⁹ Citing Michael Ventura, Mark McClain Taylor (aka Mark Lewis Taylor) argues that Vodou

is the African aesthetic shattered and the desperately put back together. More than simply “put back together,” it has been recreated to serve its people under the shattering impact of slavery and poverty. Vodou is not so much Africa in the New World as it is Africa meeting the New World, absorbing it and being *absorbed* by it, and re-forming

¹⁹ For a good examination of these trans-local affinities, see the collection of essays edited by Susanna Rostas and André Droogers, *The Popular Use of Popular Religion in Latin America* (1993).

the ancient metaphysics according to what it now had to face. (1997: 178).

This quote suggests that the encounter at the local level, between “Africa” and the “New World” is not simply a mixture of old and new, but a hybrid counterhistory to a system that Anibal Quijano has described as a “coloniality of power” (2000). In fact, the very definitions of “Africa” and the “New World” cannot in themselves be reduced to monolithic categories; they are terms that represent complex histories, especially when they are understood as a meeting place, a crossroads, and an encounter across time and space. To name but a few traditions, “Africa,” in the context of religious encounters, can mean Yoruba, Kongo, and Fon, and “New World,” can mean pre-Tridentine Catholicism, as well as the religious systems of the Mayan, Quechuan, and Aymaran peoples. Moreover, the religious encounter did not occur only between the “New World” and the traditional African religions, but within the African religions as well. Vodou is thus not only the result of “Africa” meeting the “New World,” but “Africa” meeting itself in the mercantile slave ships of the “New World”: hence, in-between the rigid colonial classifications of old/new, African/New world, ‘pagan’/Christian, etc.

Much has been written about the explosion of new forms of religion within the context of globalization(s), and many tend to portray new religious movements, and/or the appearance of ‘fundamentalism(s),’ the *integrismo*²⁰ of established traditions, as a form of resistance to globalizing homogeneity.²¹ Peter Beyer is the most consistent in this respect, arguing that since globalization tends toward the privatization of religions in the public square, religions have an important “antisystemic” role as a resource and “aid” to social movements (1995:

108). For Beyer, religious movements respond to the often ambiguous and contradictory effects of globalization through “religious performance” in either “conservative” or “liberal” options, both of which, he argues, have their attendant problems (1995: 87-9).²² Hence, his insistence on Manichean “anti-systemic” options is problematic. Beyer may be correct in arguing that religion may offer a coherent telos to a global system that is often perceived as chaotic and threatening. Yet there is no attention in his work to the hybrid practices that occur in-between his “conservative” and “liberal” options. And while “religious performance” is certainly an important religious response to globalization(s), religions are not simply performing *in response* to globalization(s); they are also performing as creators *out of* globalization(s).

Peter Beyer understands the role of local religions as potential “antisystemic” resistance to globalizing ‘modernity.’ He argues that globalization does not “mean the inevitable, evolutionary progress toward a global spread of Western modernity,” but that it has profound effects on the West as well (1995: 90). Nevertheless, he does frame globalization as the extension of the effects of ‘modernity’ to the entire world, which results predictably enough to the widely held notion regarding the return of religion as a spectre (in this ‘postmodern’ context) haunting modernity. Regarding his “conservative” option Beyer writes, [w]hether it is the ‘Evil Empire’ or the ‘Great American Satan,’ the reappearance of the devil as that which gives definition to the transcendent signals a return to a traditional way of making religion capable of communicating publicly essential information” (1995: 91). Here the return of the colonized – particularly their ‘voodoo’ irrationalities – is feared. It frightens precisely because counter-hegemonic religion is perceived as desperately dichotomizing, chaotic, irrational, and ineffective. The focus is on a homogenizing global flow that are active, while its object is the resulting local realities such as the prevalent *integrismos*, which are simply re/active. ‘Postmodern’ religions, those new articulations of the ‘irrational,’ are understood as the repressed specters of ‘modernity’ returning to cause havoc on the world. These various appeals to the particular/local as ‘irrational’ forms of resistance to the so-called “metanarratives of modernity” obscure an important point: religion cannot simply be reduced to antisystemic reactions to global flows. While it is also true that the local is not a passive and inert terrain onto which global incursions impose their own local

²⁰ There is no English term for this word, hence the use of the Spanish. It is originally from the French term *intégrisme* (it was used to speak of those who struggled to maintain the integrity of Catholic doctrine) and it referred to the anti-modernism of late-19th - early 20th century Roman Catholicism; it is now used by French intellectuals for all religious traditions. I want to veer away from the term fundamentalism, because it tends to be associated with the Protestant tradition, and because there is a widespread tendency to characterize the new Pentecostal and evangelical movements in Latin America as such.

²¹ The most popular is Benjamin Barber’s, *Jihad Vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism Are Re-Shaping the World*. Barber’s book has become a ‘cas célèbre’ since 9/11 and has popularized this view. In fact, Barber has become one of the most sought-after speakers in the post-9/11 U.S., especially among the business classes, where he has given talks at the World Economic Forum and other Holy of Holies of neoliberalism. In these talks, Barber warns about the potential for another World Trade Center-like attack unless the neoliberal elite democratize their systems – and he has been received with standing ovations! The more McWorld pushes, the more Jihad pushes back. The proof of this theory is now in the 9/11 pudding. While there is some legitimate points to be made in this regard, a simplistic action-reaction model has become widespread in popular, as well as academic discourses about globalization.

²² Beyer defines these options in these terms: “the first [conservative] would correspond to the reassertion of the devil and the second [liberal] to the acquiescence in his dissolution.” (1995: 86).

contours, neither is the local simply an anti-‘modern’ assertiveness. Indeed, the local appropriates from modernity as much as it resists it.

Catholic theologian Peter Schreiter devotes much of his important book, *The New Catholicity*, to syncretism and hybridization. Schreiter believes that “globalization, and the tensions between the global and the local, have become a seedbed of new varieties of hybridities...” (Schreiter: 76). But hybridities are certainly not new to the Americas, they have a history of over 500 years. Some critics from the tradition of world-systems theory define globalization as the “culmination of a process that began with the constitution of America and colonial/modern Eurocentered capitalism as a new global power” (Quijano 2000: 533). Whatever modernity may mean for many globalization theorists (or postmodernity for that matter), Quijano argues that it is the historical articulation of a “coloniality of power” within a capitalist world-system based on its own Eurocentric claims to racial superiority. One cannot consider the history of *mestizaje* in the Americas, in other word, the reality of cultural, religious, and biological *métissage* (or cross-fertilization), without rooting it in the notion of “coloniality of power” – the foundation on which, Quijano argues, the present economic global world-system is sustained.

In this regard, Schreiter is careful to suggest that hybridity, and the celebration of diversity, cannot be used as a veil that obfuscates the history of colonizing powers - and their resulting violence – that lie at its root. One cautionary case would be the appropriation of the term *mestizo* to celebrate the creative diversity and mixed cultural identity of many Latin American peoples. Quijano reminds us that “[b]eginning in the eighteenth century in Hispanic America, an extensive and important social stratum of mestizos (born of Spanish men and Indian women) began to participate in the same offices and activities as nonnoble Iberians” (2000: 536). In other words, the *mestizo* has historically also been used to elevate itself as superior to full-blooded indigenous peoples through a racist classification system and a racist distribution of labour under colonial capitalism’s “coloniality of power.” While it is also true that *mestizo* peoples have also been historically disparaged within colonizing ideologies, especially through a discourse of sexual degeneracy and moral impurity, along with 20th century nationalist ‘indigenismo’ movements that appealed to notions of pre-Hispanic ‘purity,’ the preferential status of the *mestizo* above other racialized identities must not be glossed over. Thus, I share Taylor’s concern that when “diversity is continually

celebrated, analyses of structural dynamics of disparity, of routine exploitation and suffering tend to fall out of a people’s roster of concerns” (1997: 173).

In the present context of globalization(s), the irruption of diversity and its accompanying hybridities, its mingling of cultures, its border crossings and migrant realities, does indeed produce something startlingly new – and it has done so for centuries!²³ Vodou is an important historical example of this process in the Americas, and it continues to be an important locus of cross-fertilization in the present context of globalization(s).²⁴ However, *mestizaje*, or *métissage*, is never a process in which pure cultures meet and mix. This is vitally important to any theology concerned with local cultures, as well as with indigenization and contextualization. One cannot construct cultures as ‘pure,’ or essentialized, entities meeting one another in time and space. Or, in the case of some definitions of inculturation,²⁵ a pure gospel meeting a harmonious culture. The postcolonial critique of the “noble savage” for example, stems out of an analysis of how Romantic literature envisioned “primitive” cultures as organic and life-affirming and in contrast to the death-dealing and fragmented life within industrialized Europe. Culture is always a contested site; there is no one unifying definition of the term.²⁶ Postcolonial theory, suggests Schreiter, has developed an alternative definition of culture, one that does not foreground “ideas and objects, but principally [understands it] as a contest in relations” (Schreiter 1997: 54). He writes, “[c]ulture is something to be constructed rather than discovered, and it is constructed on the stage of struggle amid asymmetries of struggle” (*ibid.*). Hence, a postcolonial understanding of culture presupposes a different definition of culture than that of the unified, or “integrated,” modern Eurocentric definitions of culture that are still alive in the theologies of the Catholic church. As Schreiter writes, “papal and Vatican documents, with their positive view of culture as a shaper of humanity tend to espouse this integrated perspective” (1997: 49). Only a harmonious and self-contained

²³ See Serge Gruzinski, *The Mestizo Mind* (2002), for a history of the process of *métissage* in 16th century Mexico.

²⁴ See Leslie G. Desmangles, *The Faces of the Gods: Vodun and Roman Catholicism in Haiti* (1992).

²⁵ For a Latin American liberationist critique of this view of inculturation, see Diego Irarrázaval, *Inculturation: New Dawn of the Church in Latin America* (2000).

²⁶ For an important contribution to the definition of culture from a postcolonial perspective, and with an emphasis on hybridity, see Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (1995).

opened the doors for an important critique of the globalization of neoliberal capitalism, especially with respect to its insistence on the ideology of the “free market.” Liberationists argue that “free market” ideology has become an absolute in neoliberal discourses. In a recent article, Pablo Richard writes, “el sistema aparece como maravilloso, sin embargo son siempre menos los invitados al ‘banquete neoliberal’... Lo absoluto es el mercado y no la vida para todos.”²⁸ As Jean and John Comaroff have insightfully argued, there is no “invisible hand” governing neoliberal market activity, only a “Gucci-gloved fist, that animates the political impulses, the material imperatives, and the social forms,” of what they call, “the Second Coming of Capitalism – of capitalism in its neoliberal, global, manifestation” (2001: 4). In these times of distantiation of production from capital, as well as the reification of money through speculation, the liberationist idolatry critique of market ideology is as crucial as ever – perhaps even more so because the system is more and more abstract and sacrificing even more victims. Nevertheless, liberationists will also need to expand this tension between of G*d’s *locality* among the victims²⁹ who struggle against global systems of death, to include the everyday survival of Vodou peoples through the creative negotiation of hybridized identities. This emphasis of hybridity is, of course, being developed within the ‘new voices’ in theology,³⁰ which have emerged alongside liberation theologies, and it is also being developed within liberation theologies themselves.³¹ The present context of globalization involves a process whereby individuals enter into very complex “relations of accommodation and cross-fertilization” (Peterson et al 2001b: 211). Strict lines of demarcation, between Catholic Ecclesial Base communities (CEBs), Pentecostal churches, and popular religious feasts for example, wherein the former struggles against the idols of death while the others promotes the idols of death, tend to fall away.³² As Peterson et al. suggest, individuals sustain

multiple engagements: “they might participate actively in the town’s patron saint and later read the Bible in a CEB or attend a Charismatic assembly” (*ibid.*).

Liberationists need to address these cross-fertilizations if they wish to remain faithful in their solidarity to the experiences of the people at the grassroots. For example, in an interview with a Brazilian priest Luiz Carlos Marques, Philip Berryman writes this: “He recalled an earlier experience of celebrating mass on a traditional feast of St-John with a small base community, while ignoring the crowds of people lighting the ‘fires of St. John’ and celebrating outside” (Berryman 1996: 52). However, Marques’ initial vanguardist positioning, what he refers to as a small elite “going against the traffic,” was soon transformed to a pastoral stance that focused on a “wager on the unpredictability of the poor” (*ibid.*). Some priests and pastoral workers interviewed in Berryman’s study further explained how they moved from away posture of “heroic struggle” to one of “accompaniment” within the unpredictability of marginalized experiences. At the same time, “heroic struggle” was not something freely adopted by priests, pastoral workers, and the people; it was an imposed reality during a time of extreme violence and oppression. The following statement, from a Brazilian woman’s perspective (she is unnamed), is also very telling of the grassroots reality in Latin America:

For somebody who has no problems in life, the best religion is the Catholic one; you become attached to the saints, go to church whenever you want, and nobody bothers you. For a person that goes through financial difficulties, the best religion is that of the Pentecostals, because they help you as brothers; the only thing is that you must not drink, smoke, dance, or whatever. Now, for somebody who suffers from head-aches, the best religion is the Spiritualists; it is demanding, you can’t miss a session, but it really heals. If God will allow me, when I’m actually healed, I’ll return to Catholicism (Rostas/Droogers: 1).

While some may perceive such a statement as encapsulating the threat of relativism that prevails within subaltern classes and peoples, it is more indicative of how marginalized peoples negotiate hybridity their daily lives (*lo cotidiano*). How does this woman’s experience fit into the liberationist struggle against the idols of death? Does she support the idols of death or resist them? My initial response to such a question is in line with the model of “accompaniment” adopted within the more recent pastoral work, wherein unpredictability is valued and respected. Martinique-born author and poet, Edouard Glissant argues that

²⁸ I cannot supply page numbers for this article, which I have as an unpublished revision of “La Iglesia en América Latina y el Caribe (1962-2002)” (2002). The title of the revised article is: “40 años de teología de la liberación en América Latina y el Caribe (1962-2002).” Translation: The system is perceived as wonderful, however, there few invited to the neoliberal banquet... The absolute is the market and not abundant life for all.

²⁹ Jon Sobrino’s recent christology is called: *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims, or La fe en Jesucristo: Ensayo desde las víctimas* (Spanish: 1999; English: 2001).

³⁰ The work of Virgil Elizondo has had a profound impact on the development of Latino/a theology. See Elizondo, “Mestizaje as a Locus of Theological Reflection” (1995).

³¹ See Cristián Parker, *Popular Religion and Modernization in Latin America: A Different Logic* (1996).

³² Jean and John Comaroff pejoratively define Latin American Pentecostalism as churches for whom “their millions of members the Second Coming evokes not a Jesus who saves, but who pays dividends” (2000, 24). While it is provocative and perhaps resonant with some practices, such language is nonetheless simplistic.

“[l]’extraordinaire dans ‘la créolisation’ c’est que nous ne puissions pas en faire la théorie complète parce qu’elle court à l’imprévisible et au changement radical.”³³

The reality “voodoo economics” in the everyday lives of Vodou peoples is not only a local resistance to global incursions, although this is a posture that must continue to be supported by all Christians who profess to follow Jesus. But it must also attempt to incorporate the liminal cross-fertilizations of local/global encounters. Firstly, there must be an attempt to respond to the reality of displacement and those liminal spaces where people are forced to cross real borders with the hope of finding new life. Where is the local among migrants? Secondly, there must also be an attempt to highlight those culturally liminal areas, where local/global hybridities are shaping new identities, be they religious, political, or other. What constitutes local culture here? In a world fragmented by asymmetrical power, resistance should not be opposed to hybridity, rather *crossroads* theology embraces both as mutually supportive. Vodou peoples have a remarkable history of resistance to, and creative appropriation of,³⁴ the colonizing global forces that have enslaved them, forced them into unpaid work, and plundered their ecological systems. The liberationist critique of the idols of death, which sacrifice Vodou peoples for the accumulation of capital among the elite, was a response to “voodoo economics,” which was able to conjure up wealth through the proliferation of ghostly armies, interest hikes, arms deals, and the Holy imposition of monetarist economics. In its prophetic denunciation of *mammón*, liberation theology’s critique of the idols of death remains an important condemnation of neoliberal capitalism, as it abstracts itself further, and continues to ravage the lives of Vodou peoples. Yet it also tends to essentialise the local into a reified space of resistance. Such liberationist discourses resonate with those discourses discussed above which posit religion as “antisystemic” resistance to global flows.

³³ I cannot offer page numbers for this online interview. See Glissant (1999). Translation: The extraordinary thing about creolisation is that one cannot make a complete theory out of it, because it is imbued with unpredictability and the possibility of radical change. See note 5 for Glissant’s definition of creolisation - a notion of hybridity that stems out of his own Caribbean context. Glissant’s point is relevant to all theoretical frameworks focused on hybrid processes, including my own.

³⁴ Cristián Parker calls the syncretism evident in these processes, which he finds symbolically vibrant in popular religion, *hemidernal*, a somewhat clumsy neologism for the processes that I have described as a “third space.” For Parker, *hemidernal* (from hemi+modern: half or semi-modern) “coexists and profits from the modern, but resists and criticizes the modern as well” (Parker: 115).

From a critical perspective, Vodou hybridity, or what I call resistant hybridities, can negotiate a space that takes seriously the rich and creative history of hybridity, as well as its ongoing dynamism in the Americas of the 21st century. It proposes a hybridity that does not obfuscate the very real violence of colonial subjugation, its terrifying somatic and spiritual impact on the peoples of the Americas that originally gave rise to the conditions for these forms of hybridity. Hybridized resistance is also able to negotiate a space that takes seriously the postcolonial view of culture as a site of contested relations, namely, a view that engages the complexity of power relations in history, rather than defining culture as a chaotic or unified matrix of local resistance to homogenizing/fragmenting global incursions. To conclude, I want to expand the notion of hybridity in the direction proposed by liberation theologian, historian, and philosopher, Enrique Dussel, through his notion of “trans-modernity.”

Vodou History as “Trans-Modernity”

At the root of any encounter shaped by a context of powerful asymmetries, the safeguarding and creation of local identities can be characterized by both resistance and hybridity. Vodou history is a good example of this process, a process that has historically shown hybridity in itself to be a form of resistance, and that resistance can emerge from a process of hybridization at a local level. Vodou thrives, like other strategies among Vodou peoples, in that liminal region in between the local/global encounters that have fashioned the messy history of the Americas. To use Roland Robertson’s now famous expression, Vodou lives and breathes, indeed re-creates itself, at the “glocal” level (Robertson 1995). The Americas are the center of the process we have come to call globalization; it has been so, some have argued, for 500 years. To borrow the famous metaphor by Eduardo Galeano, the Americas have been “open veins”; a continent bled not only by the extraction of natural resources, but also, by the disposability of both those indigenous to the land and those forcibly brought over on slave ships.³⁵ Quijano writes that the “vast genocide of the Indians in the first decades of colonization was not caused principally by the violence of the conquest... but took place because so

³⁵ See Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America* (1973). Galeano’s book is focused on Latin American history, but a similar history of conquest and plunder can be made with respect to how indigenous peoples were forcibly removed from their lands and with respect to the history of slavery in North America.

many American Indians were used as disposable manual labor and forced to work until death” (Quijano 2000: 538). This disposability of “racial inferiors,” which of course also included *mestizos* and black slaves, has not disappeared in the Americas.

In what Jean and John Comaroff have called the “Second Coming of Capitalism,” namely in its neoliberal form, both global and “salvific,” we witness a system that continues to render disposable many people from so-called ‘inferior’ races. Grosfoguel argues that because 1960s and 1970s *dependentista* theorists privileged the economic sphere and did not pay enough attention to the “coloniality of power,” they have left colonial relations intact in the present context. His example of how the (economically) progressive Sandinistas reproduced old racial/colonial hierarchies in relations to the indigenous Misquitos of the Atlantic coast is a product of this tendency to overlook present-day colonial relations (Grosfoguel 2000: 368). Taylor also speaks of this disposability from within empire, in “lockdown America,” where the disciplining of people of color (especially African-Americans, Latino/as, and indigenous peoples) is maintained by the system of capital punishment, where people are conceived of as social junk, “debris that has been managed, cleaned up, or disposed with” (Taylor 2001: 56). Since the abolition of slavery in the U.S., the prison system has served as the principal site for the disciplining and management of disposable black bodies. For Taylor, present-day prisons form a direct line of continuity with the legacy of slavery in the Americas, as does capital punishment with the legacy of lynching (2001: 45). The Canadian government also continues to promote colonial relations with indigenous peoples, especially with respect to treaty rights and territorial sovereignty, by the imposition of a Band Council system and other mechanisms of the federal Indian Act. This colonial system divides communities at the grassroots level, and encourages disunity within, and strife with (often poor rural) neighboring communities. Colonial relations are alive and well among the peoples of the Americas. They are relations that are not only based on racial hierarchies, but on economic, gender, and racial/ethnic stratifications as well. Quijano’s concept of “coloniality of power” implies that any analysis of power relations must take seriously the fact that the world is not fully decolonized. These colonial relations are deeply seated in our societies. Grosfoguel therefore argues for a “second decolonization” process in Latin America, “different and more radical” than the first “juridicopolitical ‘independence’ from the imperial European states,” which was incomplete and

driven by elites (2000: 368). The complex histories of race relations and the construction of identities within the colonial histories of the Americas must be moved to the forefront of theology, especially those theologies, like liberation theologies, which are focused on the realities of local cultures. Following Quijano’s lead with respect to the “coloniality of power,” but also disputing some of his premises with respect to the history of this system. Enrique Dussel’s work advances such an agenda.

Mercantile capitalism has a long history in shifting European centers: Spain-Genova, Amsterdam, and London. Dussel argues that the “world-system” hypothesis, which has subsumed some streams of *dependentista* theory in Latin America, was preoccupied with unmasking the Eurocentrism of modernity’s masters of suspicion (Hegel, Marx, Weber...). They saw the development of modernity as internal to Europe, dating back to Greek civilization and moving through the Medieval Latin world, and the Renaissance and so on. This notion was central to developmentalist ideologies in the second half of the 20th century, which also posited the notion of internal development, hence national, as foundational to modernization. The “common sense” – yet another of many “common sense” discourses among the elite – of developmental ideology was that every society would eventually and gradually achieve what the North had achieved internally. All failures were thus blamed on internal factors and could ultimately be repaired by economic experts through internal adjustments and fine-tuning. Most of the time, these internal problems were understood to be economic in nature, but they were sometimes understood as cultural. For example, under-development was in some cases blamed on the predominant Catholic ethos of some countries, an ethos that required a good dose of the Calvinist spirit, so instrumental in the development of European capitalism according to Max Weber. Catholicism did not possess the same attributes accorded to the Protestant ethic described by Weber, thus Catholic societies were believed to lag behind in a kind of anti-modern feudal slumber.³⁶ The ‘modern’ fearfulness of things, especially ritualistic things (like popular religious practices), that smell of what is perceived to be a ‘pre-modern’ medieval Catholicism in the Americas, can certainly be traced to the tendency in developmentalist discourses

³⁶ For a more recent application of Weber’s thesis in the contemporary context of Latin American evangelical and Pentecostal growth, see David Marin, *Tongues on Fire* (1990).

to ascribe problems on the internal/national context, which ultimately side-steps center-periphery dynamics.

However, Dussel argues that this "first" critique of Eurocentrism by the "world-system" theorists also carries within it a "second" Eurocentric presupposition: namely, as it is argued in Quijano's work and many other world-theorists, that European global hegemony is 500 years old, thus originating with the discovery of the Americas. For Dussel, this thesis continues to posit Europe at the center of history. Even if Europe is reframed as a global power that plundered and conquered its way through history, rather than developing through an internal spiritual, ethical, and political idealism, Europe remains the subject of world history. According to Dussel, other civilizations, namely Chinese, Muslim, and Hindu, were more powerful actors in world history than the Europe of the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, at least up until the French Revolution (1789), which he situates as a symbolic date for the beginning of European global hegemony. Dussel argues that the beginning of European hegemony emerged with the Industrial Revolution, principally British and French. He further argues that between 1400-1800 "China was the greatest producer of commodities, and that the China Sea was an unequalled mercantile site within the world-system" (Dussel 2002: 227). While China was an important continental power in the East, its huge internal markets meant that external markets were insignificant to its economy. On the other hand, Dussel argues that Western Europe, "still recovering demographically from the depopulation of the plague, turned outward" (2002: 228). Europeans could only buy into the huge Chinese markets because of the silver plundered in the Americas, but they could not "impose their own products" (2002: 229). Dussel argues that to think non-Eurocentrically is to understand the Industrial Revolution in Europe as a "response to a 'vacuum' in the East Asian market, especially China and Hindustan" (2002: 230-1).

Dussel also critiques 'postmodernity's' elevation of alterity and otherness, because it also articulates this vision within a Eurocentric framework. The 'post' in postmodernity is not a "beyond" for Dussel; it does not convey an "externality" to modernity, but simply constitutes an extension of modern inevitability through the processes of globalization. While Dussel's analysis is principally based on economic categories, he makes a very interesting claim about the potentialities and possibilities in those cultures and histories that have existed "beyond," that have functioned externally to, yet within, the processes that have been called

modernity. He writes that

exteriority is a process that takes off, originates, and mobilizes itself from an "other" place (one "beyond" the "world" and modernity's "Being," one that maintains a certain exteriority...) than European and North American modernity. From this "exteriority," negated and excluded by hegemonic Europe's modern expansion, there are present-day cultures that predate European modernity, that have developed together with it, and that have survived until the present with enough human potential to give birth to a cultural plurality that will emerge after modernity and capitalism. This "beyond" ("trans-") indicates the take-off point from modernity's exteriority... that is, from what modernity excluded, denied, ignored as "insignificant," "senseless," "barbarous," as a "nonculture," an unknown opaque alterity, but at the same time evaluated as "savage," uncivilized, underdeveloped, inferior... These are the diverse names given to the nonhuman, the unrecoverable, the "historyless"... (2002: 234).

Dussel's attempt at a non-Eurocentric "world-system" paradigm, which locates Europe at the periphery for the first 300 years of its global outreach, is provocative. In so far as Dussel posits the centrality of "exteriority" as a starting point, his history is not focused on hybridity as such. However, it does open an analytic space for important processes in history that have been erased in Eurocentric discourses, such as hybrid ones. In the tradition of liberation theologies, Dussel's history is future-oriented; it hopes for a "trans"-modernity that will be "multicultural, versatile, hybrid, postcolonial, tolerant, and democratic" (2002: 236). Dussel here does not evoke a Romanticist pre-modern ethos that simply resists modernity. For him, no group, no community, no individual is untouched by modernity; there is no pure culture that can express a completely 'pure' externality to modernity. Europe has in fact been hegemonic for 200 years in his "trans-modern" history and it has had very real and important impacts on local cultures. But modernity has also created its own externals: its own 'rejects.' In other words, modernity has been sustained by a "coloniality of power," the underside of which contains an alterity, an otherness, a "beyond," an "exteriority." And it is within this "exteriority" that Dussel finds hope. This space of "exteriority" can thus be understood as both hybrid and resistant, both global and local, an in-between space conjured up by Vodou peoples in order to survive in their day-to-day lives within globalizing modernity.

Global flows are not all-encompassing at the local level, bringing about the end of heterogeneity, or corrupting 'authentic' cultures. Nor are they only resisted

by 'pre-modern' forces repressed by modernity (*integrismo* theory). Nor are they solely idols of death sacrificing victims at the periphery of world-system. Such assertions can obscure the hopeful celebratory hybridities (and syncretisms) present across cultural spaces. These hybridities continue to cross-fertilize in popular religious practices, in some Pentecostal movements, in Afro-Latino/a syncretisms, and in the daily negotiations of many religious systems in the Americas. For Dussel, global flows create their own externals, which are resistant and hybrid in relation to modernity. The local certainly trans-localizes, but it is not everywhere, nor is it everywhere the same. The local, Jean and John Comaroff argue, is never the same thing; "sometimes it is family, sometimes it is town, sometimes it is nation, sometimes a flow or a field, sometimes a continent or even the world; often it lies at a point of articulation among two or more things" (Comaroff/Comaroff 1999: 294). What may seem quite parochial or insignificant can also be an increasingly global phenomenon. To think in terms of the "glocal" character of globalization helps to unsettle the strict boundaries between the local and global, between action and reaction, in order to help us understand the liminal as a site of possibility and hope. This liminal site of possibility is what Dussel has called "trans-modern," for it finds its starting point beyond the simplistic asymmetries of European modernity: Christian/'voodoo,' local/global, and *integrismo*/modernity. The liminal is also a place of hope, hope for a renewed creation in the wake of increasing impoverishment and the threat of war. The liminal is hybrid, because it is preoccupied with meetings and encounters, with the transgression of boundaries, and with the very concrete reality of migrations.

Our present political context should serve as a reminder of the plight of peoples within the global "theatrics of terror": those sent to "death row," within the belly of the beast, because they have no capital to lessen their punishment; those who are forced to migrate to strange countries to find work, but instead discover rising xenophobia because the separation of capital from production has created unemployment and resentment; those who flee ancestral lands and make a home in the growing urban 'slums,' because of an expanding export-economy needed to pay interest on the foreign debt. But one must also awaken to its other side, to its "other face," the face of hope, which is celebrated in the popular religious practices, in the great religious syncretism of the "New World" experience, and in the pageantry and fiestas of Vodou peoples. An important historical moment appears on the horizon of this "other face," this underside: the

slave revolts on the Isle of Saint-Domingue, in 1791. Inspired by the French Revolution (1789), the "black Jacobin" Toussaint Louverture lead an insurrection that was initiated by a Vodou ceremony, lead by the priest Boukman, in Bois Caiman. This moment constitutes a hopeful counterhistory of resistance and hybridity within local/global relations, and at the periphery of "world-systems." It is important because it constitutes a moments of "trans-modernity": with its emphasis on Vodou resistance shaped by the hybrid formations of global encounters.

1791 is a key moment for *crossroads theology*, which is never a retreat into the local as a kind of neo-Romanticism that understands local contexts as pure, intact, or even 'pre-modern,' forms of resistance to global systems. Nor is *crossroads theology* a simple extension of globalization theories, which optimistically define these complex processes in ways that abstract from the harsh and oppressive realities of local contexts. *Crossroads theology* resides close to the hemorrhaging woman, who boldly reaches out from the crowds to touch the famous Rabbi, thus slyly creating a space for herself that heals and promotes life. *Crossroads theology* is focused on those often hybrid strategies that liminal people conjure up in order to survive hostile conditions; it is Jesus calling a young girl back to life from the border regions of death: *talitha cum!* *Crossroads theology* is also wilderness theology, situated in-between those global empires that thrive on free labor and the slavery of 'inferior races,' and those local contexts where "another world is possible," but never a certainty. *Crossroads theology* resides in-between Egypt and the promised land, just as Christians remain always encamped in the wilderness, in-between a first and second coming, in that fragile liminal space between promise and hope. *Crossroads theology* resides at the boundaries of global and local encounters, often surprised by the manna that appears there. Such unexpected manna is a life-giving survival strategy forged in the shadow of (neoliberal) empire; it is a way forward into insecurity and a gift from a G*d who resides in the liminal, often hybrid, spaces of Vodou peoples.

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